



SB 462, AAC Civil Restraining & Protective Orders

From: Sharlene B. Kerelejza, MSW

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Good afternoon, and thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. My name is Sharlene Kerelejza and I am the Executive Director of Meriden-Wallingford Chrysalis, an agency serving adults and children who have experienced or witnessed domestic violence.

I'd like to speak with you about SB 462, an Act Concerning Civil Restraining and Protective Orders. Specifically, I'd like to speak with you about section one, which makes several additions to what judges can order as part of the civil restraining order. Essentially, this section ensures that domestic violence offenders may be held financially responsible to continue to provide care to and on behalf of a spouse he's harmed and any dependent children.

As you may be aware, 36 other states include some form of temporary spousal and child support in their civil restraining order process. This includes our surrounding states of Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, and Vermont. This may be an essential component to ensure the safety of domestic violence victims and their children.

Safety does not always require a SafeHouse. Overwhelmingly, for victims and survivors of domestic violence and their children, if safety and financial independence can be secured in the community, they fare better. However, abusers who leave, either by choice, restraining order or incarceration, often take their financial resources with them.

One survivor, when asked about the benefits of financial support through the Temporary Restraining Order, said this:

Please, I ask you, seriously, to just imagine trying this: give up your car when you walk out of here today, without planning, and with \$200 in your pocket and nothing else, and do not return home. On your own, self-selected, 'Legislators Homeless Day'... see how many days you last before finding housing, food, employment. I truly believe it is in your capacity to understand how your constituents who face domestic violence live.

While the Judicial Branch has expressed concerns about the cost of implementing this type of relief and the fiscal and administrative burden that it could result in, we believe that the cost will be minimal. Judicial surveyed other states about their experiences with incorporating financial relief and of the 11 states that responded, 5 said there was no fiscal impact and 6 were unable to provide any information regarding any potential fiscal impact.

There is also one other perspective I'd like you to consider, which is shifting the financial burden. Currently, survivors are not receiving any financial remedies with the granting of an order. Those families need to sustain themselves somehow. For some, they come to Chrysalis, or another center like us, or food pantries, or shelters. We grant them a few months' worth of rent, replacement ID or a refrigerator full of food. Last year, we gave out \$31,684. One agency in Connecticut gave out \$31,684. That money comes from somewhere. My salary is spent, in part, for me to write grants: to foundations, United Ways, municipalities and so on, to cover the costs these families incur. If we shift the burden of payment back to abusers, those who caused the problem, that money that we are spending as agencies can be used differently. In essence, the victim, her children, you and I are paying each time an offender does not.